

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by a browser on a display of a computer, said method comprising the steps of:
 - (a) providing access to a program for controlling the Internet browser interface;
 - (b) using the controlling program to create a file that is stored on the computer and that defines an interface object; and
 - (c) causing the file to open when the browser is activated so as to establish a link between the computer and a predetermined Internet site and provide a browser user with access to the defined interface object.
2. A method as recited by claim 1, further comprising the step of:
 - (d) downloading information to the file from the predetermined Internet site.
3. A method as recited by claim 1, wherein said step (b) comprises creating a file on the computer including an ActiveX control that defines an interface object.
4. A method as recited by claim 1, wherein said step (b) comprises creating a file on the computer including a Plug-in that defines an interface object.

5. A method of dynamically controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by a browser on a display of a computer, a file being located on a data storage device of the computer and defining an interface object, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) causing the file to open when a user of the computer and browser activates the browser;
- (b) causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site;
- (c) receiving in the file, from the predetermined Internet site, information for defining all or part of the interface object; and
- (d) displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface on the computer display while the browser is activated.

6. A method as recited by claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

- (e) periodically causing the browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site; and
- (f) receiving in the file, from the predetermined Internet site, additional information for defining all or part of the interface object.

7. A method as recited by claim 5, wherein said step (d) further comprises:

- determining if the interface object is displayed along with the Internet browser interface when the Internet user is not connected to the predetermined Internet site; and
- if the interface object is not displayed with the Internet browser interface, re-displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface.

8. A method as recited by claim 5, wherein said step (b) comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

9. A method of dynamically controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by a browser on a display of a computer, a file being located on a data storage device of the computer and defining an interface object, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) causing the file to open when a user of the computer and browser activates the browser;
- (b) causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site;
- (c) receiving in the file, from the predetermined Internet site, information for defining all or part of the interface object;
- (d) displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface on the computer display while the browser is activated; and
- (e) preventing the file from closing while the browser is activated.

10. A method as recited by claim 9, further comprising the steps of:

- (f) periodically causing the browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site; and

- (g) receiving in the file, from the predetermined Internet site, additional information for defining all or part of the interface object.

11. A method as recited by claim 9, wherein said step (e) further comprises executing a program loop to prevent the file from closing.

12. A method as recited by claim 11, further comprising the step of terminating the program loop when the browser is no longer activated.

13. A method as recited by claim 9, wherein said step (b) comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

14. A method of dynamically controlling an Internet browser interface displayable in an initial browser window by a browser on a display of a computer, a file being located on a data storage device of the computer and defining an interface object, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) causing the file to open when a user of the computer and browser activates the browser;
- (b) causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site;
- (c) receiving in the file, from the predetermined Internet site, information for defining all or part of the interface object;
- (d) causing the browser to create a new browser window;
- (e) preventing the initial browser window from being displayed by the browser; and

(f) displaying the interface object along with the Internet browser interface in the new browser window.

15. A method as recited by claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

(g) periodically causing the browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site; and

(h) receiving in the file, from the predetermined Internet site, additional information for defining all or part of the interface object.

16. A method as recited by claim 14, wherein said step (d) comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to a predetermined Internet site.

17. A method as recited by claim 14, wherein said step (e) further comprises:

identifying a handle for the initial browser window;

hiding and/or disabling the initial browser window;

creating a pointer to control the browser; and

creating a new browser window.

18. A method as recited by claim 14, further comprising the steps of:

determining if the browser has opened an additional new browser window; and

if an additional new browser window has been opened, determining whether to add the interface object to the additional new browser window.

19. A method as recited by claim 14, further comprising the steps of:
determining if the browser has opened an additional new browser window;
if no additional new browser window has been opened, determining whether to close the browser; and
if the browser is to be closed, closing all browser windows, including the initial browser window.
20. A method of increasing the frequency with which an Internet user accesses an Internet site using an Internet browser and a computer, said method comprising the steps of:
- (a) causing the browser to establish a connection to the Internet site when the Internet user activates the browser; and
 - (b) receiving, from the Internet site, and storing on the computer in a file, instructions for the browser to periodically re-establish a connection to the Internet site.
21. A method as recited by claim 20, further comprising the step of causing the browser to re-establish a connection to the Internet site at a periodic interval and in response to the instructions in the file.
22. A method as recited by claim 21, wherein the periodic interval is determined by the Internet site.

23. A method as recited by claim 22, wherein the periodic interval is determined by the Internet site and dependent upon Internet user traffic experienced by the Internet site.

24. A method as recited by claim 20, wherein said step (a) further comprises automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to the Internet site when the user activates the browser, independent of whether the browser is preprogrammed to access a predetermined Internet web site.

25. A method of causing a user of a computer and Internet browser to access a predetermined Internet site, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a file on the computer including a definition of an interface object and instructions for the browser; and
- (b) upon activation of the browser by the user of the computer and Internet browser, and in response to the instructions in the file, automatically causing the browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site.

26. A method as recited by claim 25, further comprising the step of receiving in the file, from the predetermined Internet site, information for defining all or part of the interface object.

27. An Internet browser interface displayable by an Internet browser on a computer display and including an ActiveX control interface object that is displayed with the Internet

browser interface while the browser is activated and which provides a link to a predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the browser.

28. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 27, wherein said ActiveX control interface object causes the Internet browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site.

29. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 27, wherein said ActiveX control interface object enables the Internet user to customize the interface object.

30. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 27, wherein said ActiveX control interface object enables the Internet user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site.

31. An Internet browser interface displayable by an Internet browser on a computer display and including a Plug-in interface object that is displayed with the Internet browser interface while the browser is activated and which provides a link to a predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the browser.

32. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 31, wherein said Plug-in interface object causes the Internet browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site.

33. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 31, wherein said Plug-in interface object enables the Internet user to customize the interface object.

34. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 31, wherein said Plug-in interface object enables the Internet user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the Internet user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

35. A method for establishing an affinity between an Internet user and a predetermined Internet site, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing to the Internet user, via the predetermined Internet site, access to a control program that permits a user customizable interface object to be created on an interface of a browser used by the Internet user to traverse the Internet; and

(b) enabling user selected functions to be accessed via said interface object, said functions enabling the Internet user to interact with the predetermined Internet site.

36. A method for delivering information to an Internet user from a predetermined Internet site, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing to the Internet user a control program that permits an interface object to be created and displayed by a browser used by the Internet user to traverse the Internet;

(b) causing said interface object to continue to be displayed by the browser as the Internet user traverses the Internet from one Internet site to another Internet site;

(c) establishing a link between the predetermined Internet site and said interface object through which information may be provided for visual display via said interface object; and

(d) causing said information to remain visible as the Internet user traverses the Internet from one Internet site to another Internet site and after said link between the predetermined Internet site and said interface object is terminated.

37. A method for delivering a software program to an Internet user from a predetermined Internet site, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing to the Internet user a control program that permits an interface object to be created and displayed by a browser used by the Internet user to traverse the Internet;

(b) causing said interface object to continue to be displayed by the browser as the Internet user traverses the Internet from one Internet site to another Internet site;

(c) establishing a link between the predetermined Internet site and said interface object through which a software program may be provided via said interface object; and

(d) causing said software program to be executable as the Internet user traverses the Internet from one Internet site to another Internet site and after said link between the predetermined Internet web site and said interface object is terminated.

38. A method for delivering information to an Internet user from a predetermined Internet site, comprising:

(a) providing to the Internet user, from the predetermined Internet web site, a control program that permits an interface object to be created and displayed by a browser used by the Internet user to traverse the Internet; and

(b) causing said interface object to continue to be displayed by the browser as the Internet user traverses the Internet to an Internet site different from the predetermined Internet web site.

39. A method as recited by claim 3, wherein said ActiveX control enables user-customization of the interface object.

40. A method as recited by claim 4, wherein said Plug-in enables user-customization of the interface object.

41. A method as recited by claim 1, wherein said interface object enables a user of the computer and browser to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

42. A method as recited by claim 5, wherein said interface object enables the user of the computer and browser to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

43. A method as recited by claim 9, wherein said interface object enables the user of the computer and browser to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

44. A method as recited by claim 14, wherein said interface object enables the user of the computer and browser to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

45. A method as recited by claim 25, wherein said interface object enables a user of the computer and browser to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

46. A method as recited by claim 35, wherein said interface object enables the Internet user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the Internet user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

47. A method as recited by claim 36, wherein said control program of said step (a) permits a user customizable interface object to be created.

48. A method as recited by claim 36, wherein said interface object enables the Internet user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the Internet user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

49. A method as recited by claim 37, wherein said control program of said step (a) permits a user customizable interface object to be created.

50. A method as recited by claim 37, wherein said interface object enables the Internet user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the Internet user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

51. A method as recited by claim 38, wherein said control program of said step (a) permits a user customizable interface object to be created.

52. A method as recited by claim 38, wherein said interface object enables the Internet user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the Internet user is connected at the time the search is initiated.

53. A method of controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by an Internet browser on a display of a computer, the Internet browser enabling a user of the computer and Internet browser to access and navigate the Internet and to receive and display on the computer display one or more web pages from one or more Internet sites, including the display of a web page from a predetermined Internet site, the Internet browser having at least one Internet browser toolbar having at least one toolbar button providing a predetermined functionality to the user of the computer and Internet browser, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing, at the predetermined Internet site, access to a program for controlling the Internet browser interface; and

(b) making available for downloading by the predetermined Internet site, a file for displaying of a user toolbar as part of the Internet browser interface.

54. A method as recited by claim 53, wherein the user toolbar comprises an interface object and is customizable by the user to provide user-selected functionality in the user toolbar.

55. A method as recited by claim 53, wherein the file comprises an ActiveX control.

56. A method as recited by claim 53, wherein the file comprises a Plug-in.

57. A method as recited by claim 54, wherein the interface object is a toolbar button.

58. A method as recited by claim 54, wherein the interface object is a search window that enables the user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the browser at the time the search is initiated.

59. A method as recited by claim 53, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including the user of the computer and Internet browser, said method further comprising the step of making available for downloading by the predetermined Internet site, information specific to the user of the computer and Internet browser for defining all or part of the user toolbar and wherein all or part of the

display of the user toolbar is dependent upon the information, specific to the user of the computer and Internet browser, downloaded by the predetermined Internet site.

60. A method as recited by claim 59, further comprising the step of making available for downloading by the predetermined Internet site, additional information, specific to the user of the computer and Internet browser, for defining all or part of the user toolbar, and wherein all or part of the display of the user toolbar is dependent upon the downloaded information.

61. An Internet browser interface displayable by an Internet browser on a display of a computer, the Internet browser facilitating connection between the computer and one or more Internet sites, including a predetermined Internet site, the Internet browser having at least one Internet browser toolbar having predetermined functionality available to a user of the computer and Internet browser, the Internet browser further facilitating display on the computer display of one or more web pages from the one or more Internet sites, including display of web pages from the predetermined Internet site, said Internet browser interface including a user toolbar that is displayed as part of the Internet browser interface and along with the Internet browser toolbar while the Internet browser is activated regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the Internet browser.

62. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 61, wherein said user toolbar comprises an interface object and is customizable by the user.

63. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 62, wherein said interface object is a toolbar button.

64. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 62, wherein said interface object is a search window that enables the user to initiate a search at the predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the Internet browser at the time the search is initiated.

65. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 62, wherein said interface object comprises an ActiveX control.

66. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 62, wherein said interface object comprises a Plug-in.

67. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 62, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including the user of the computer and Internet browser, wherein said interface object causes the Internet browser to establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site when the Internet browser is first activated and to receive information specific to the user of the computer and Internet browser from the predetermined Internet site, and wherein all or part of said user toolbar is dependent upon the information, specific to the user of the computer and Internet browser, received from the predetermined Internet site.

68. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 67, wherein said interface object causes the Internet browser to periodically re-establish a connection to the predetermined Internet site while the Internet browser is activated to receive additional information, specific to the user of the computer and Internet browser, from the predetermined Internet site, and wherein all or part of said user toolbar is dependent upon the received information and additional information..

69. A method as recited by claim 2, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, and wherein said step (d) comprises downloading information specific to a user of the browser from the predetermined Internet site to the file.

70. A method as recited by claim 5, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including the user of the computer and browser, and wherein said step (c) comprises downloading information specific to the user of the computer and browser from the predetermined Internet site, and wherein all or part of displaying the interface object of said step (d) is dependent upon the information, specific to the user of the computer and browser, downloaded from the predetermined Internet site.

71. A method as recited by claim 9, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including the user of the computer and browser, and wherein said step (c) comprises downloading information specific to the user of the computer and browser from the predetermined Internet site to the file, and wherein all or part of

displaying the interface object of said step (d) is dependent upon the information, specific to the user of the computer and browser, downloaded from the predetermined Internet site.

72. A method as recited by claim 14, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including the user of the computer and browser, and wherein said step (c) comprises downloading information specific to the user of the computer and browser from the predetermined Internet site to the file, and wherein all or part of displaying the interface object of said step (f) is dependent upon the information, specific to the user of the computer and browser, downloaded from the predetermined Internet site.

73. A method as recited by claim 26, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including the user of the computer and browser, and wherein said step of receiving comprises downloading information, specific to the user of the computer and browser, from the predetermined Internet site to the file.

74. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 28, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including information specific to a user of the computer and browser, and wherein all or part of said interface object is dependent upon information, specific to the user of the computer and browser, received from the predetermined Internet site.

75. An Internet browser interface as recited by claim 32, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including information

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specific to a user of the computer and browser, and wherein all or part of said interface object is dependent upon information, specific to the user of the computer and browser, received from the predetermined Internet site.

76. A method as recited by claim 36, wherein the predetermined Internet site maintains user-specific information for a plurality of users, including the Internet user, and wherein said step (c) comprises downloading information specific to the Internet user from the predetermined Internet site and wherein all or part of displaying the interface object is dependent upon the information, specific to the Internet user, downloaded from the predetermined Internet site.

77. A system for controlling an Internet browser interface displayable by an Internet browser on a display of a computer, said system comprising:

- a server, said server including a program accessible over the Internet by a user of the computer for controlling the Internet browser interface; and
- a file downloadable by said server to the computer for controlling the Internet browser interface.

78. A system as recited by claim 77, wherein said downloadable file causes a user toolbar to be displayed on the display of the computer as part of the Internet browser interface.

79. A system as recited by claim 78, wherein said downloadable file causes an interface object to be displayed as part of said user toolbar.

80. A system as recited by claim 79, wherein said interface object enables a user of the computer to customize the user toolbar and comprises an ActiveX control.

81. A system as recited by claim 79, wherein said interface object enables a user of the computer to customize the user toolbar and comprises a Plug-in.

82. A system as recited by claim 79, wherein said interface object is a toolbar button.

83. A system as recited by claim 79, wherein said interface object is a search window that enables a user of the computer and Internet browser to initiate a search at a predetermined Internet site regardless of the Internet site to which the computer is connected via the browser at the time the search is initiated.

84. A system for controlling an Internet browser displayable on a display of a computer, said system comprising:

a server for downloading files; and

a file, downloadable by said server, said file controlling the Internet browser so that the Internet browser enables a user of the computer to perform functions via the Internet browser not available to the user via the Internet browser prior to said file being downloaded.